



Bill Niskanen, RIP

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William A. Niskanen, an economist who held an amazing number of different interesting jobs, died yesterday. Early in his career, he was a Robert McNamara whiz kid. His experience in the bureaucracy led him to write his early contribution to public choice, *Bureaucracy and Representative Government*, in 1971. In fact, I first heard of him in the fall of 1971 when **Gordon Tullock was speaking at the University of Western Ontario**, where I was an undergrad that year, and Tullock referenced his book a couple of times.

I first met Bill at a Liberty Fund seminar at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio in the summer of 1975. I was about to take an assistant professorship at the University of Rochester's Graduate School of Management (now the Simon School) and Bill was finishing up as a professor at UC Berkeley's Public Policy school and heading off to be chief economist at Ford. Some of the other attendees at that seminar were Svetozar Pejovich, Jim Buchanan, William H. Hutt, Karen Vaughan, David Friedman, Colin Campbell, and Marilyn Flowers. I remember talking to Bill one on one and expressing my delight that one of "us" got a job high in the corporate world. He expressed his excitement also.

As it turned out, it didn't work out because Bill refused to support Ford's push for barriers to trade in cars. He quit.

But Bill had a way of landing on his feet, going briefly to UCLA Business School and then to the Reagan administration as a member of the Council of Economic Advisers. That's where I got to work closely with him because he and chairman Martin Feldstein were my bosses for two years. Working under two people who saw the world differently and who didn't seem to feel comfortable communicating with each other was--interesting.

It was while I was there that I came to think of Bill as a "wise man." Not a wise guy. A truly wise man. He had an amazing ability to step back from the issues of the day and examine them. Herb Stein was right when he said, as his blurb for the book jacket of Bill's later book, *Reaganomics*, that Bill was "that rarest of people, an objective insider."

Indeed, it was that fact that led me to choose Bill as the author of the article on **Reaganomics** in the *The Fortune Encyclopedia of Economics*. Of all the articles I had to fight for with the Time/Warner bureaucracy, that was the one I had to fight for the hardest. It became apparent to me that some of the people at Fortune wanted a hatchet job on Reagan and Bill insisted on telling the truth--the bad *and* the good.

Bill was also a strong opponent of the 2003 Iraq War. He and I talked about it at some length at the 2002 Mont Pelerin Society meetings in London, as we floated along on the Thames during the excursion day. We both saw through Bush's BS.

Bill Niskanen was a good man. I will miss him.